

SHOULD WIZARD HIT MOMMY?

SUMMARY:

Jack was the father of two little kids – Jo and Bobby. His wife Clare was carrying their third child. Jack would tell a story to his daughter **Jo** out of his head in the evenings and for Saturday naps. This custom of story-telling began when Jo was two-year-old and it was continuing for the last two years. Each new story only differed a bit from the basic tale. There always was a small creature, usually named Roger, for example, Roger Fish, Roger Squirrel, Roger Chipmunk etc. He always had some problem and he would go to the wise old owl. The owl would tell him to go to the Wizard, who would perform a magic spell that solved the problem. The Wizard in turn would demand in payment a number of pennies greater than the number Roger creature had. But at the same time he would direct the animal to a place where the extra pennies could be found. Then Roger would become so happy that he played many games with other creatures. Roger then would go home to his mother just in time to hear the train whistle that brought his daddy home from Boston. Jack then would describe their supper, and the story was over.

Jack found this story-telling session especially tiring on Saturday, because Jo never fell asleep in naps any more. One Saturday Jack asked Jo about whom the story should be today. Roger Skunk, she said firmly. A new animal; they must talk about Skunk at nursery school. Jack started the story of the tiny creature Skunk, who lived in the dark deep woods. His name was Roger Skunk and he smelled very bad. He smelled so bad that other animals of the jungle would not play with him. They would run away and Roger Skunk would stand there all alone.

Roger Skunk went to the wise old owl and told his problem. The owl asked the Skunk why he did not see the Wizard. Then he went to the Wizard and told that he smelled very bad and all the little animals used to run away from him. The wise owl had told wizard that he could help in that manner. The Wizard took his

magic wand and asked Roger Skunk what he wanted to smell like. Roger Skunk told him that he would like to smell like roses. The Wizard chanted and Roger Skunk started smelling like roses.

The Wizard asked Roger Skunk to pay seven pennies. Roger Skunk said that he had four pennies only and he began to cry. The Wizard directed Roger to go to the nearby magic well and he would find three pennies there. Roger Skunk took out three pennies from the well and gave them to the Wizard. Now all the other animals gathered around him because he smelled so good. They played various games and laughed. It began to get dark so they all ran home to their mummies. Jo thought that the story was all over.

When Roger Skunk went home his mummy said that the smell was awful. She asked who made him smell like that. Roger Skunk said that the Wizard did so. She said that they were going right back to that Wizard. He said that all the other animals would run away with his bad smell. But his mummy said she did not care. He should smell the way a little Skunk should have smelled. So she took Roger with her and went to the Wizard. When the wizard opened door, she hit him with her umbrella and explained how the wizard's magic infuriated her. The wizard spelled another magic and Roger smelled as foul as he did earlier. But she was displeased with this new ending and wanted her father to make the wizard hit Roger's mommy. But Jack was not ready to make any change as he thought Joe should accept him without questioning. Jo protested but Jack said that it was daddy's story. He said then Roger Skunk and her mummy went home. They had supper and when Roger Skunk was in bed, Mommy Skunk came up and hugged him and said she loved him very much. He told her that the story ends there.

Jo asked her daddy if the other animals ran away from Roger Skunk. Jack said no, they finally got used to the way Roger Skunk was and did not mind it at all. Jo commented that she was a stupid mummy. He asked her to have a long nap as her brother Bobby was also sleeping. Jo told him that she wanted him to tell her the story the next day that Wizard took that magic wand and hit that mummy, right over the head. Jack said that it was not the story. The point is that the little Skunk loved his mummy more than he loved all the other little animals. Moreover, she knew what was right. But Jo insisted that tomorrow he should say that the Wizard hit that mummy. Jack said that he would see and asked her to sleep.

He closed the door and went downstairs. Clare was striking the chair rail with a dipped brush. Above him footsteps vibrated. These were Jo's footsteps. He threatened to beat her and then the footsteps slowed down.

Clare observed that it was a long story. He simply said “the poor kid”. He watched his wife working hard on the wood-work. She was doing painting work. Thus the writer displays adult authority on one hand and the child’s inquisitiveness on the other.

Main Points

1. Jo was Jack’s four year old daughter. Every evening for Saturday’s naps, Jack told his daughter a self-composed story.
2. The story always has a character Roger with other animal name & each new story is a slight variation of basic tale.
3. In one story Roger Skunk was having bad smell. No animals played with him. He changed his smell with the help of wizard.
4. The wizard was hit by Skunk’s mother as he had changed is smell. Jo didn’t like the end as she wanted that wizard should hit mommy.

Short Answer Type Questions

Q1. What was usually the basic storyline of the tale that Jack told Jo almost daily?

Ans. The stories that Jack used to tell Joe were the slight variation of the basic tale about a small creature usually named Roger. Roger would go to the wise owl whenever in trouble. The wise owl would ask him to go to the wizard who would finally solve Roger’s problem.

Q2. How was the Skunk’s story different from the other stories narrated by Jack?

Ans. Jack was a perfect story teller and could change his subject at the spur of the moment to keep the interests of the listener. All his stories revolved round an animal Roger. He changed them with a slight variation but the basic tale remained the same. This time it was about a baby Skunk who smelt very badly whenever he went to play with others. They used to tease him and never cooperated with him. He could feel racial segregation.

Q3. What new phase has started in the custom of the story telling?

Ans. A new phase has started in the custom of story-telling. In the beginning Jo used to listen to the story quietly and used to sleep after that, but from sometime she had started listening to the story cautiously and started showing curiosity to know about many things she did not know. She had also started asking some moral questions like: Does God really exist? Are magic spells real? Now she

wants to know everything and has even started stressing upon her own point of view.

Q4. Why did Roger Skunk go to see the old owl?

Ans. Roger Skunk would go first to the wise owl for help. He had sad expressions on his face. The owl lived on the tip-top of the tree. Roger Skunk would complain to him that the other animals had left him alone because of his bad smell. None was ready to side with him rather they remarked “Stinky Skunk.” The wise owl listened to him carefully and gave a deep thought over it. At last he advised Roger to go and meet the Wizard.

Q5. Describe the wizard’s room.

Ans. The wizard’s room is a white house over the crick. Inside it are all magic things. All jumbled together in a big dusty heap as the wizard did not have any cleaning lady.

Q6. How did Roger Skunk’s mommy react when he smelled like roses?

Ans. When Roger Skunk smelled like roses, his mommy asked what that awful smell was. Roger Skunk replied that the wizard had made him smell like that. She got angry and with Roger went to the wizard and hit his head with an umbrella.

Q7. How did Jo react to Jack’s storyline?

Ans. Jo did not agree with Jack’s version of the story in which Roger Skunk’s mommy hit that wizard right over his head for changing Roger Skunk’s smell. Instead she wanted that the wizard hit Skunk’s mommy.

Q8. What does Jack actually want Jo to know and understand in the story?

Ans. Jack actually wants Jo to know and understand that parents always love their children as they are. Smelling good or bad is immaterial against the natural biological bond. But this thing is Jo’s beyond understanding. She understands what she sees around; but not beyond that.

Q9. Who is Jo? How does she respond to her father’s story-telling?

Ans. Jo is Jack’s four-year-old daughter. Every evening and for Saturday naps, Jack tells his daughter a self-composed story. Each story is a slight variation of

the original. Jo is captivated by each story and gets so involved in it that she asks questions on it and even predicts the next move or development in the tale.

Q10. What do you think was Jo's problem?

Ans. Jo was mainly concerned that Roger Skunk should be accepted by other animals. She was annoyed that the mother had not understood Skunk's misery. So, she wanted the wizard to teach his mother a lesson. She wanted her father to change the story to suit her taste.

Q11. Why was Roger Skunk's mother angry? What did she finally tell him?

Ans. Roger Skunk was very happy on having the rose smell. His mother got perplexed at that awful smell. She asked who had done that. Roger told about the Wizard. She grew angry on both Roger Skunk and the Wizard. She finally told him to go back to the Wizard and ask him to convert him to his original smell. She told him that she would hit the Wizard with an umbrella. She hit the wizard and the later changed Roger Skunk into its foul smell. Now, Roger Skunk had no smell of roses and he began to smell very bad again.

Q12. Why does Jo call the Skunk's mummy stupid?

Ans. Roger skunk had an ugly smell. He met the Wizard and got it changed but his Mommy did not like it. She visited the Wizard and urged Skunk to the original position. Thus mummy was unable to understand the problems of Skunk. Thus Jo calls Skunk's mummy stupid.

Q13. How did Jo want the story to end?

Ans. Roger Skunk's Mommy hit the Wizard hard on the head. She did not wish the stinky Skunk to smell like a rose. Jo did not approve of her mother's silly action. She wanted the Wizard to hit Mommy Skunk back on her head to end the story. He should not have restored Roger Skunk's stinky smell.

Q14. Why does Jack insist that it was the Wizard that was hit and not the mother?

Ans. In reality Jack wants that the children should obey their parents since the elders are always right. Jack thinks that the only mother Skunk knows what is good or bad for her son. Since, the baby Skunk loves his mother more than anything else so it is correct that Wizard should not hit the mommy.

Q15. How did the ‘mommy’ behave when Roger Skunk got the usual smell?

Ans. The Wizard turned Roger Skunk in his original condition. The mother was much elated and they returned home. They heard the sound of the train bringing Daddy Skunk home from Boston. Then they had lima beans, pork chops, celery, mashed potatoes and Pie-oh-My for Dessert. She hugged Skunk time and again and showered affection. Now Skunk smelled like her little baby again.

Q16. What makes you ascertain that Roger suffered “racial segregation?”

Ans. A Skunk is a small black and white American animal. Here Roger Skunk smelled very badly. Due to his foul smell, no other animal was ready to play or mix with him. They teased him and called him ‘Stinky Skunk’. He would stand alone and weep with tears in his eyes. Thus he was deeply pained at the segregation and indifferent attitude of other animals.

Q17. What makes Jack feel caught in an ugly middle position?

Ans. Jack feels caught in an ugly middle position as Jo’s non-acceptance of the ending of his story has taken him by surprise. To him, this is almost like an act of defiance and he feels that Jo is questioning his authority. This causes confusion in his mind and he does not really know how to react to his little daughter who has suddenly started asserting her opinions, most contrary to her behaviour in the past.

Q18. Why does Jack insist that it was the wizard that was hit and not the mother?

Ans. Jack insists that it was the wizard that was hit and not the mother for he wants Jo to understand that the Skunk’s mother knew what was best for him. Also, Jack is taken aback a little to find that Jo has actually dared to question him. This appears like an act of defiance to him and he suddenly feels that he is on shaky ground, and needs to re-establish his authority. When he had started this story about the poor stinky Skunk, he had been reminded of all the humiliations of his own childhood and in a way the stand that he takes regarding the Skunk’s mother is in defence of his own mother.

Q19. Which do you think is a better ending of Roger Skunk’s story, Jo’s or her father’s? Why?

Ans. Jack presents a decent as well as appropriate ending since a child cannot think as a mother. Skunk’s mother wanted that Skunk should have originality.

In this context Jack tries to make Jo understand his view-point. He has no desire that Jo should form a negative opinion about Mommy. He tries to explain that she should be loved, respected and well behaved by her child.

Long answer type questions

Q1. What is the moral issue that the story raises?

Ans. The story examines adult attitude to growing children. The issue that it raises is whether children should be allowed to use their abilities to reason and question or be forced to remain mere shadows of adult influence and thought. Jo dared to question her father's interpretation of how the story of the stinky Skunk should end. This came as a shock to Jack who was used to a complacent Jo who always enjoyed the story session designed by her father. Jack had failed to appreciate the fact that Jo was growing up and was bound to have thoughts of her own and may not always agree with the way he viewed things. Jack found it hard to come to terms with this.

Q2. What is your stance regarding the two endings to the Roger Skunk story?

Ans. Children see facts as they are, as did Jo. She thought it was unfair that the Skunk's mother should go back to the wizard and force him to change the Skunk back into his stinky old self. This way he would lose all his friends and be lonely and sad. When he smelt of roses, he was more acceptable and had friends.

Adults, on the other hand, are coloured by biases or sometimes base their conclusions on the wisdom of their experiences, as did Jack. He felt that the Skunk's mother knew what was best for him. This can be translated to mean either that adults know what is best for their children or that adults are in the habit of imposing their will on children. Thus, how the story should end would depend largely on how each one interprets the facts of the story and their underlying implications.

Q3. Why did Jo think Roger Skunk was better off with the new smell?

Ans. Roger Skunk was very happy on having the rose smell. His mother got annoyed. She thought that a Skunk was a Skunk and he must smell like a Skunk. She decided to make the Wizard give him back his original smell. Jo thought Roger Skunk was better off with the new smell. He could play and have the company of other animals.

Jack wants to stress that for a mother her son has got more prominence than anything else. She views that Skunk never smells bad. Other animals may keep away from the stinky Skunk but for the mother, the rose smell becomes a distinct mark of recognition. She finds it strange to see Skunk in an awful smell

of roses since she has the same bad smell of Roger Skunk. She feels elated when good smelling Roger becomes a stinky Skunk again. Thus, Jack insists that the Wizard should not hit the Mommy.

Q4. Why does Jo want that the Wizard should hit the mommy? Does her stand reflect a child's perspective on life?

Ans. It is an acceptable fact that adults have refined and mature view than that of a child. They are the better judges to form a very judicious view on every matter. On the other hand children are ignorant, innocent, unexperienced and immature. They rather wander in the romantic world of their own. Accordingly we can say that a child symbolizes innocence and spontaneity while an adult has a practical approach.

In this story Jo wants Wizard to hit Mommy as she has forced the Wizard to change the foul smell in Skunk rather than the rose smell. The girl does not think appropriate that the Mommy should hit the Wizard from her perspective, it has been worthy if the Wizard Hits Mommy since Skunk too needs the company for playing.

Q5. How does Jo want the story to end and why?

Ans. It is very important to note that the children have different view on life than that of the adults. They live and dream in their own their imaginative world. They have no malice and remain away from petty differences. Here in the story, Jo is a very sensible girl. She does not like the ending that Mommy should hit the wizard. Rather she wants that the Wizard should hit the mommy for her failure to realize the problems of Skunk. She calls her "Stupid Mommy" and insists for a change in the story. Since Roger Skunk is the hero of the story, Jo does not want her hero to face any complications. She does not imagine Skunk roughly and stinky. She has got every sympathy for Skunk. She thinks it unfair on the part of Skunk's mommy to go and get Roger's smell bad again. She wants the ending must be changed.